

# The Rockridge News

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CIRCULATION: 6,700 RESIDENCES; 200 BUSINESSES

Sponsored by the Rockridge Community Planning Council (RCPC) • 4900 Shattuck Ave., PO Box 22504, Oakland, 94609

“RO” illustration by Laura Serra | Temporary nameplate set in Sutro font to honor late typeface designer & Rockridge resident Jim Parkinson | see bio on page 9

## The Feminist Message Behind Gen Z and Millennial ‘Grandmas’

by Zoë Psomas, Senior at Oakland Tech



Elizabeth Vecchiarelli strings garland for her store Preserved | photo by Zoë Psomas

Amidst the bustling excitement of College Avenue lies a quaint shop that has shelves lined with jars of all sizes, packets with hand drawn labels and tools that one can only guess the purpose of.

Elizabeth Vecchiarelli opened Preserved back in 2015 as a place where she could spread her passion for canning and fermentation. The store has gained so much popularity that it moved to its current shopfront in June 2025—to have a larger space to display goods and teach classes.

“When I first opened, not just customers, but even family and friends thought that my idea was pretty fringe,” remembered Vecchiarelli. “But then I was able to experience how pop culture, shows and books can change people’s perception, which is really

why we grew so much.”

Fermentation isn’t the only domestic hobby that is experiencing a spike in popularity. According to Insight News Wire, the global arts and crafts market has reached \$47.97 billion, with North America accounting for 40% of the market. Most of that is accounted for by younger generations like Gen Z and Millennials, Insight reported.

Natalia Anna Michna is a feminist with a doctorate in philosophy based in Poland, who wrote the book “Women and Culture: The Problem of Experience in Feminist Philosophy.” She is among a group of feminists such as Beth Ann Pentney, Elizabeth Groeneveld and Betsy Greer who claim that, beyond being a hobby, crafting has the potential to create social change.

*Craft, continued page 5*

## A Seance (of Sorts) at the Haunted Rockridge Improvement Club

by Liam Pierce

Three weeks before Halloween, some afterhours footage of The Rockridge Improvement Club (RIC) went viral, slipping through screens like a cold draft. It’s a static, wide-angle black-and-white shot of the beloved dive bar—ironically named after a 1900s community club that frowned on saloons—completely empty with a row of bartop stools seen from the bartender’s side.

Seven seconds in, the third bar stool from the left quickly pulls about three feet away from the tidy row against the counter into a semi-arc—seemingly entirely on its own, a spectral invite to take a seat. Without a soul in sight.

*Haunting, continued page 6*

‘Seance’ crew, from left-to-right: Cinthia Varkevisser, Colin Pierce, Judy Sorensen, Sara-Jean Bartky & Kaylee Gonzales



Photo by Liam Pierce

INSIDE:

● Food Drive Totals, page 3

● Aurora School Merger, page 4

● Solving the College/Claremont Mess, page 5

**RNews CORRECTIONS**

● "Gift Guide" (Dec. '25)  
 The Epsom salt float is offered by **Reboot Float Spa** [rebootfloatspa.com](http://rebootfloatspa.com), not **Cocoon Day Spa**, which, instead, offers: deep tissue relief, lymphatic massage, total relaxation and a blend of multiple massage techniques. [cocoondayspa.com/rockridge/](http://cocoondayspa.com/rockridge/)

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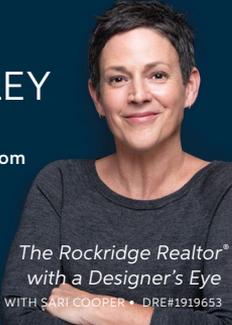
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# Contribute to the New RCPC Website

by Gary Barg, RCPC Board Member

RCPC will launch a new version of our community website towards the end of January 2026. You'll see familiar features such as a searchable archive of The Rockridge News and some new highlights like a neighborhood blog and an events calendar, which grew out of the Community Vision Plan.

The blog will feature articles from each new issue of The Rockridge News, articles written by the RCPC board and by you: the Rockridge community!

## SUBMITTING BLOGS AND EVENTS

### BLOGS:

- Articles should focus on issues that are important to our community, for example: safety, housing, sustainability and transportation.
- Topics will evolve to reflect current concerns of the community.
- Articles should be fact-based without bias or opinion.
- Submit articles to: [rcpcwebeditor@gmail.com](mailto:rcpcwebeditor@gmail.com) for light editing and review to ensure they meet criteria. Please include your name and the street you live on.

### EVENTS:

- The events calendar will feature community-based happenings like club meetings, exercise groups, educational groups and others.
- Events must be based in Rockridge and be currently active with scheduled activities.
- They are neither partisan nor political events that support particular candidates.
- Submit your event to: [rcpcwebeditor@gmail.com](mailto:rcpcwebeditor@gmail.com) & include:
  - a picture or two relating to event
  - date & location for next activity
  - describe purpose of the group
  - a short description of the next scheduled activity.

Let us know if you have questions: [info@rockridge.org](mailto:info@rockridge.org).

# The Rockridge News

The Rockridge News was founded in March 1986 by Don Kinkead and is published monthly (except August). It is sponsored by the Rockridge Community Planning Council (RCPC), a nonprofit public benefit organization founded to: preserve and enhance the unique character of the Rockridge neighborhood; promote the health, safety and quality of life of its residents; furnish a forum for community involvement; and provide leadership and representation of neighborhood interests.

## Rockridge News Production

Liam Pierce.....Editor & Layout Artist  
Susan Montauk.....Business & Distribution Mgr.

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Contact the board: [chair@rockridge.org](mailto:chair@rockridge.org)  
For information: [info@rockridge.org](mailto:info@rockridge.org)

## Contacting The Rockridge News

Are there topics you'd like to see covered in the Rockridge News? Have questions about newsletter distribution? Want to volunteer to be a Rockridge News distributor? We'd love to hear from you.

## Letters to the Editor

Letters are limited to 350 words and published at the editor's discretion in the order received. Send letters to: [editor@rockridge.org](mailto:editor@rockridge.org). Please include name, email and street of residence. Deadline is the 11th of each month for the upcoming newsletter.

All submissions accepted for publication are subject to editing for clarity and brevity. The Rockridge News reserves the right to refuse any articles, letters or advertisements.

## Newsletter Subscriptions

For a yearly subscription to the Rockridge News, send your check for \$22, payable to RCPC with "Rockridge News" noted on the memo line.

Mail payment to: RCPC, 4900 Shattuck Ave., PO Box 22504, Oakland, CA, 94609

## ADVERTISING DEADLINE for FEB. 2026: JAN. 22, 2026

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Views expressed in published articles do not necessarily reflect those of the Rockridge News, its editor, or the board of directors of RCPC.

### THE SNAP FOOD DRIVE WAS A HUGE SUCCESS!



by Star Lightner, RCPC Vice Chair

#### \$14,126 TOTAL RAISED

\$6,126 donated by the neighborhood

\$8,000 match:

- \$2,000: RCPC
- \$5,000: College Avenue Presbyterian Church
- \$1,000: Chabot Road Neighbors

#### 1,539 POUNDS OF FOOD

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## Become a Rockridge News Marshal

Welcome aboard Tim Kelly, our new Marshal for Alcatraz area distribution for Rockridge News!

Residents from Alcatraz Ave. to the Berkeley border are thankful to Cristin Williams for her excellent service and will see no interruption in delivery of Rockridge News. Thank you, Tim!

We say goodbye and thank you to Paolomee Udani. Her life has become much busier and she needs to relinquish her College Ave. route.

Please let us know if you live nearby and can take the Coronado route. The College route is particularly fun for anyone who likes to stroll the Avenue.

We don't want to leave any block within RCPC boundaries out of the delivery network!

### AVAILABLE ROUTES

#### 14C/14D:

Both sides of Coronado Avenue from 51st St. to Desmond Street. Deliver copies to the library of Merrill Gardens at Rockridge senior living community, 5238 Coronado Ave.

#### CAv1:

Businesses/apartments along College from Claremont to BART. Stack at Zachary's (50 papers).

#### To volunteer:

Call / email Susan at 510-547-3855 or smontauk@gmail.com if you are interested and/or need more info. ●

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# Aurora School Grows Early Education Programs in Collaboration with Mills College Children’s School

by Amina Tongun, Junior at Oakland Tech



An aerial view of Aurora School’s campus. | Photo courtesy of Aurora School

Aurora school is preparing to expand their educational offerings through a new collaboration with Mills College Children’s School (MCCS), which is set to close in June 2026 after Northeastern University’s merger with Mills College.

Approximately 20 MCCS families are expected to transfer to Aurora and the school committed to hiring at least two MCCS educators, with plans to hire more depending on enrollment.

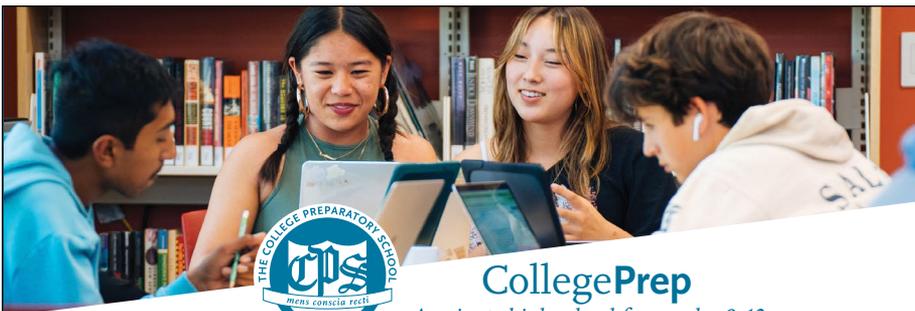
The collaboration will include the addition of a full-day transitional kindergarten and preschool program over the course of three years, and will serve as a mix between MCCS and Aurora’s curriculum. Aurora leaders emphasized that the arrangement is not a merger, but rather a community collaboration, focusing on growth rather than consolidation.

“Ultimately our early childhood program would be modeled on the same ethos that we built our K-8 program,” said head of school Lynsey Kamine.

Kamine described MCCS’s closure as a huge loss for the community—MCCS has been serving Oakland for nearly 100 years— and said the collaboration was formed in response to that transition. Kamine said that Aurora hopes to prioritize hiring of MCCS staff during the process to help maintain continuity for students.

School leaders say the collaboration aims to preserve the legacy of MCCS while expanding early childhood education options in the Rockridge area.

Kamine said, “The goal is to make an educational community that kids and families deserve.” ●



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*Craft, continued from cover*

“The feminists were the first to reclaim domestic crafts as meaningful and important,” Michna told Rockridge News. “They brought attention to those practices, which were devalued or omitted by traditional arts.”

**LEADING THE WAY**

In the 1960s and ’70s, feminist artists began experimenting with domestic crafts to create art, challenging the narrative that only traditional mediums of paint and sculpture could be deemed art. Feminists highlighted the tasks women had been doing for centuries by yarn bombing (quickly covering objects with a knitted or crocheted layer), creating intricately quilted tapestries and embroidering political messages.

Faith Ringgold, for example, was famous for her story quilts, inspired by her African-American heritage. Some common themes in her work were sexuality and motherhood, ideas that are explored extensively in feminist fields of study—all detailed in her textiles.

Holly Gundolfi, an eight-year Rockridge resident, witnessed just how empowering the elevation of domestic crafts to art could be for her mother.

“She was a one-woman factory cranking out quilts,” Gundolfi said. “I asked her if she would consider displaying some of her quilts; she did and it became a very popular art show at my friend’s coffee house. She realized, ‘oh, this is something that is important.’”

Grandma hobbies can create change through the communities they create. To grow their local fermenting community, Preserved hosts a bimonthly food and culture swap, where people bring food and cultures like sourdough starters.

“We sell cultures and starters, but really, that stuff is meant to be passed down and we encourage people to do just that,” Vecchiarelli said. “You want to start brewing kombucha, you’re gonna brew, you’re gonna get a lot of scobies, so you might as well pass those scobies along.”

Michna said that a big part of the power in domestic crafts is how they facilitate connections that offer a safe space to discuss trauma and oppression. As domestic hobbies have grown in

popularity, these communities increasingly span age groups.

“One of the most important features of handicrafts is their ability to connect generations,” Michna said. “Handicrafts preserve intergenerational knowledge; they’re a means to cast some experiences, some thoughts.”

**PASSING THE TORCH**

Both Gundolfi and Susanne Schuster, another Rockridge resident, have passed down their artistic talents to their grandchildren. For Schuster, it was cooking that piqued her grandchildren’s interests.

“We like to cook together—there are wonderful children’s cookbooks,” Schuster said. “We’d go to the store, get sushi rice and talk to the person at Safeway that makes sushi to get some ideas.”

Schuster has been crafting since kindergarten, when her teacher taught her to knit. She later learned how to sew from her godmother, who lived down the street. But Schuster is hesitant to call her art feminist. She never imagined that her knitting or sewing could create feminist change. She sees public displays of dissent as a more effective means to create change than post-socialism’s “weak resistance,” a term used by Michna to describe social action that emphasizes small, everyday acts of resistance.

“I used any methods I could think of to incite feminist change,” Schuster said of her time protesting in the ’60s and ’70s. “But I didn’t have anything that lent itself to the cause other than a

screaming voice and the ability to walk.”

On the other hand, Ayaan Sheth-Lin, a Rockridge Gen Z resident who enjoys knitting and baking, agrees with Michna’s theory. Sheth-Lin believes that partaking in domestic hobbies is a way of reclaiming them to be a symbol of autonomy rather than domesticity.

“If you’re being forced to knit, or it’s being seen as a sign of womanhood and purity, then it’s not really feminist,” she said, referencing women of past generations. “But if it’s in the context of operating outside of a capitalistic system and creating something, then it definitely is.”

In addition to boycotting a capitalistic society by making crafts instead of buying them, Vecchiarelli argues that trying out domestic traditions can connect people with their matriarchs.

“It’s like tapping into your inner grandmother,” Vecchiarelli said. “It’s what women have been doing for centuries; there’s something empowering in bringing those talents back to support the community and family.”

Whether or not grandma hobbies truly constitute a new feminist movement, Michna argues that they’re worth trying out.

“History showed us that sometimes the great revolutions begin with very small gestures,” she said. “Sometimes we just don’t know that what we’re doing is going to change the world radically.”

*Editor’s note: author Zoë Psomas just won a four-month fellowship with Oaklandside to report on challenges & opportunities facing Oakland Public Schools, starting this month.*

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### Haunting, continued from cover

“I don’t know how it happened,” RIC owner Scott Ayers said, mentioning that he saw footage of a bar manager Nathan Gale closing up 45 minutes before the motion sensor-activated cameras picked up the moving chair. “I’m still waiting for an employee to say, ‘Oh, it was me,’ but that still hasn’t happened.”

For many, the Oct. 9 footage felt like tangible proof of the persistent, half-century old rumors of the building being possessed by spirits of the non-booze variety. There are neighborhood whispers of shadows and sounds—and even an unconfirmed rumor of an over-influenced California College of the Arts professor in the ’80s who died in the very space the chair moved. These are the makings of Rockridge legend.

The video was convincing enough to draw the attention of the TV show Ghost Hunters, who are planning to film an overnight investigation at the end of January. But the need to connect beyond the veil felt more urgent. It called for an immediate seance.

### GHOST EXPERIENCE

“This isn’t a seance,” said Cinthia Varkevisser, a professional mystic and Rockridge resident from 1991–2011, jokingly waving her hands as if to conjure a full body apparition. “It’s not even as close to as sexy as it is on TV. But it should be fun!”

On Dec. 23, at the stroke of midnight, Varkevisser led a Rainbow Coalition of nine believers and skeptics alike in what she felt more comfortable calling a “ghost experience.” She seated everyone in a circle of chairs by the fireplace.

Her rationalization about ghosts was transparent enough: that everyone contributes and receives energy differ-

To see the video of the chair mysteriously moving, visit: [instagram.com/the\\_ricbar](https://www.instagram.com/the_ricbar)

ently. And that everyone in the room would become a barometer to whatever histories were etched into the room like grooves in a record—if they properly tuned themselves. Some people leave behind energy after they die and some become entities. In the terms of the otherworldly, if an energy is a current, then an entity is the will behind a current.

Varkevisser then made some distinctions between energies/entities: collective energy—layers of emotion or intention—leaves residue behind through repeated action; there are entities caught in repetitive loops, reliving their own version of Groundhog Day; and conscious intelligences, such as guides or transient entities, that engage with a space or person with intention, often in response to a specific energy.

Varkevisser then asked if anyone had prior experiences with energies and/or entities in RIC. Ayers, a former rock star in his band The Lovemakers, had slept in the back room many nights since buying the place in 2016. But he’s experienced nothing worth telling around a campfire.

Two employees, Sara-Jane Bartky and Kaylee Gonzales, said they saw jet-black shadows race across the storage room wall when nothing should’ve generated them. Bartky said at one point she heard a woman’s voice in her ear when no one else was there. They had theories about this being the ghost of a farmer tilling the land in a direction maybe spiritually askew from the building plot, another about an angry minister, though the building was never a church.

### TUNING IN

After asking this motley Scooby Doo gang to relax their bodies and tune in, Varkevisser dispatched them to feel out the space for themselves, providing candles to place in any parts where the energy moved them.

Several people said that one bathroom had a dark vibe to it, as well as a photobooth tucked into a corner of an arcade room that had an old photo of a man (that Bartky later theorized was her ghost farmer). Some people felt headaches or anxiety in different spaces—including where the barstool moved in the video. Varkevisser insisted that whatever energy moved it was tied to the space, not the specific chair.

Examining the exact area where the bar stool moved in the video and the location of the camera, it becomes apparent that this would be hard to pull off in the world of the living. You can watch the video, as well as the motion-activated footage of Gale closing 45 minutes prior, directly from the security app, which means it’d be complicated to slip AI in there.

“Could someone hide under the bar and push the chair out and sneak out?” Ayers said with genuine doubt unbefitting of someone pulling your barstool leg. “It would take a lot of patience, but yeah, definitely possible.”

The very wide angle of the video obscures two areas where a prankster could’ve been but they were either too far or very tricky: far to the left of the screen with fishing wire to pull the chair or they would’ve had to be flat on the ground or squished in the tiny space between the stools and the bar. To add difficulty to the prank, managing a push with that force from below—given stools’ extremely high center of gravity—would take some wizardry of physics.

A dozen or so candles flicked shadows across the walls as Varkevisser rounded everyone up. She pointed to a spot to the left of the fireplace—a few feet from the stool that moved—where there were a couple of candles and asked who placed them there and what they felt. Gonzales sensed a chill there.

“My arm hairs raised up,” said Ayers, who prides himself as a skeptic who hopes to be proven wrong.

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Haunting, cont'd from previous page

It was then that Varkevisser revealed that there was, indeed, a ghost in the room. There were no bolts of lightning; the bulbs didn't flicker—she said she mostly senses these kinds of things through conversations with her ancestors and in her throat chakra.

“Guess what? This is the lady,” Varkevisser said matter-of-factly, later noting that she sensed a ghost even before she arrived. “She’s an organizer who doesn’t like things messy. But she likes that [Ayers] is tidy.”

Varkevisser sensed that this woman was a manager of sorts, who organized small objects in that space—maybe in the 1930s—who dressed conservatively and maybe died in her 40s.

After tapping into everyone else’s read on the space—explaining that others might have felt different energy wavelengths that she didn’t—Varkevisser concluded the non-seance by asking Ayers to create an altar for this woman by the fireplace. Then, everyone snuffed out their candles and left. The camera did not pick up any barstools moving on their own that night.

AFTERLIFE EFFECTS

Varkevisser’s most steady work comes from a handful of realtors when a house isn’t selling. She comes in to clear the house by asking energies or entities what they need and—in case of a ghost—tries to make a communion between past and present. She said after, houses often sell in a couple weeks.

“Starting exactly the next night after our ghost experience, business has been up,” Ayers said, noting a 15% daily increase. “I hate to admit it might be more than a coincidence.”

By New Year’s Eve, there was a pile of small objects for the lady, including rice, flowers, candles and incense.

Ayers played a show that evening in a Grateful Dead cover band that rang in midnight right in front of the fire. Perhaps with this spectral lady as the fifth band member, keeping time.

But if our ghostly lady was so organized, what’s with pulling the chair out of line? “I don’t really have an answer for that,” Varkevisser said. “But my sense is that it’s not her.” ●

5527 Vicente Way is an Example of the Density Bonus Law in Action

by Muhammad Alameldin, RCPC Board Member

For renderings, visit: tinyurl.com/m9bbebf2

The proposed development at 5527 Vicente Way—set to pour foundation in early January—offers a concrete example of how recent state housing laws might shape construction in Rockridge in the near future. The project involves redeveloping a large residential parcel into 14 for-sale town homes, each three stories, with a mix of two- and three-bedroom homes.

Several neighbors asked during the RCPC-led Community Vision Plan (CVP) process how the California Density Bonus Law functions in practice. In this case, the density bonus allowed for one additional home and provided several waivers from zoning standards that granted authority to build additional units.

In exchange, one home will be sold at an affordable price to a very low-income household. For a two-person household in 2025, that means an annual income of no more than \$63,950.

The homes range from roughly 930 to 1,200 square feet. Although compact, the units are designed to meet modern expectations: open layouts,

green building features, individual solar arrays, EV-ready off-street parking and a private yard or deck.

The project is a joint effort between two Rockridge residents, Will Mollard of the development company Workshop1 and Mike Branagh of Branagh Development, the latter of which developed the small row houses at 60th and Telegraph in 2015. Both have worked locally for over a decade and said they approached this site with the goal of creating homes that are attainable for families who want to stay in, or move into, the neighborhood. Construction is underway, with sales anticipated to begin in summer 2026.

The development will pay standard impact fees, including approximately \$40,000 for transportation and infrastructure, \$52,000 for schools, \$140,000 for water and \$13,000 for sewer. It is also expected to generate more than \$200,000 in one-time transfer taxes and approximately \$175,000 in property taxes annually. ●

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# Rockridge Man of Letters Shaped the Look of News, Music, Bay Culture for Over 50 Years

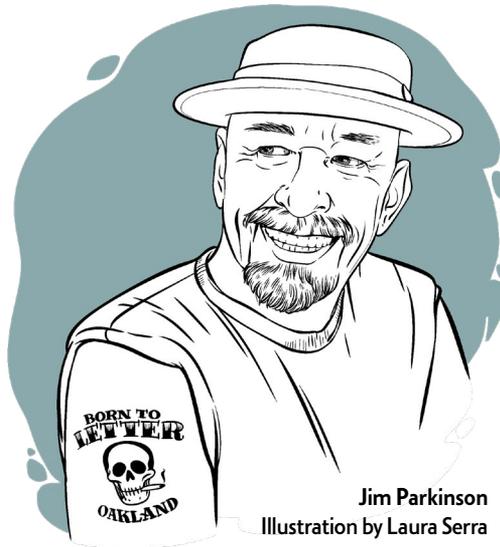
Written and designed by Stephen Coles

We encounter letters of the alphabet every day, all day. Arranged together as words, they warn us, persuade us and inspire us. They deliver good and bad news. They tell us where to go and what to do. And it's not just about what they say, but how they say it; the design of letters can instantly conjure a time, place or emotion.

Yet how often do we think about the people behind the shapes of those letters? It's easy to forget that practically every letterform we see—whether in print or on screen—was first drawn by a human.

One of the world's most successful creators of those letters humbly resided in Rockridge, totally unknown to most of his neighbors. Designer and painter **Jim Parkinson** (1941–2025) spent most of his 83 years in the East Bay, and lived his last 40 on Broadway Terrace. He was a unique talent (and my dear friend).

Jim drew letters and designed typefaces for dozens of familiar brands, from Rolling Stone to the Ringling Brothers. He made fonts for the San Francisco Chronicle and other publications, and refined countless nameplates for magazines and newspapers. Visit any newsstand in the



Jim Parkinson  
Illustration by Laura Serra

U.S.—and even some abroad—and you'll see Jim's work. Over the course of his career, his logos could be found on the covers of Atlanta Magazine, Esquire, Los Angeles Magazine, Men's Journal, Mother Jones, Newsweek, the Chicago Sun-Times, Los Angeles Times, the San Diego Union-Tribune, the Toronto Star and many more.

Jim was born in Oakland and raised in Richmond. A neighbor—Abraham Lincoln Paulsen, known as the “Wizard Penman”—introduced Jim to the idea of lettering as an artform. Paulsen could write just about anything upside-down and backwards, and was even a featured attraction in the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition.

“Mr. Paulsen presented lettering to me as something fun and a little magical,” Jim wrote in his memoir, soon to be published by Letterform Archive in San Francisco. “At the same time I was learning my A-B-C's in grammar school, I was practicing them at home in [Paulsen's trick lettering styles].”

While Jim was still young, his family moved south so he could attend Piedmont High School. For college, he didn't stray far, enrolling at the California College of Arts and Crafts in 1959, just as its historic campus on Broadway began to emanate a distinctly bohemian vibe.

“It was as if all the little beatniks and arty people from hundreds of high schools were all gathered in one place,” Jim wrote. “That was the student body. And there was a steady flow of local artists, beat poets, jazz and blues musicians and Arts and Crafts alumni drifting onto the campus. There was always something going on and the atmosphere was very seductive.”

After graduating, Jim took a job as an artist at Hallmark Cards in Kansas City, where he spent his only years outside the Bay Area. His incredible knack for rendering any kind of lettering style was perfectly suited to greeting cards. But Jim wasn't built for traditional employment, so he returned to Oakland after only five years and launched a freelance career that would last for more than half a century.

From his home studio on Howe Street near Piedmont Avenue, Jim soaked up the counterculture of the late 1960s and '70s, doing work for old classmates and people he met at concerts and parties.

“I worked for money and for trade,” Jim wrote. “I lettered for beer. I lettered for furniture. I even did a logo in exchange for a 1953 Buick.”

Jim's rock-and-roll lifestyle landed him album art gigs for bands like the Bay Area's own: Creedence Clearwater Revival and The Doobie Brothers. Yet it was his acquaintance with an Oakland Hills magician and purveyor of typefaces, Dan X.

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CIRCUS

AERODROME

The  
Doobie Brothers

The New York Times Magazine

Rolling Stone

Left: Hand-lettered logos by Jim Parkinson  
Right: Jim's home studio on Broadway Terrace





Jim depicted California signs in oil paintings. Many are a record of businesses long departed, like this Alameda shop.

Solo, that led to his most prominent job.

In 1976, as Rolling Stone magazine matured from an underground rag to a more polished publication, art director Roger Black sought someone with type skills. Solo introduced Black to Jim, who went on to draw Rolling Stone's custom headlines and typefaces, as well as redesign the magazine's logo. Jim's iconic mark—a swashy italic with dimensional shading—is still used today (with minor modifications).

After Jim's mother died in 1982, he moved into her house, a rare Colonial Revival in Upper Rockridge. He tucked his studio under a second floor gable.

This is where I first got to know Jim. When I moved to Oakland in 2004, he was one of the first people to connect

with me, and he welcomed any interested person to his home office.

That tiny room contained a half-century of loving and crafting letters. Its walls and sills were packed with Jim's work and the stuff that inspired it: vintage prints, lettering manuals, antique art supplies, wood type, comics, family photos, drawings by friends, thank-you notes from students and his favorite collectibles: amusing headlines clipped

from newspapers.

I returned many times with my pals. Their eyes would widen as he casually opened flat files filled with original artwork, the hand-inked sources for some of the most famous logos in the world. They smiled as he pulled up his sleeve to reveal his tattoo—a blunt-smoking skull with "Born to Letter" spelled out above it and "Oakland" below. He shared it all with joy, wisdom and a casual silliness that—despite all his talent—kept him off of a pedestal. He took his work seriously, but never himself.

When Jim wasn't drawing logos or making fonts, he was painting signs. Not how you think. Jim's hobby was depicting vintage neon signs as fine art. His photo albums from road trips throughout the American West provided fodder for dozens of large paintings that eventually filled the walls of his home. He captured every peeling surface and broken glass tube in a way that somehow looks even more real than his snapshots.

In 2010 Jim married Dorothy A. Yule—a talented maker of miniature books who deserves her own feature. The two met at the San Francisco Chronicle where they worked together in the art department.

Jim's last few years were stricken with Alzheimer's and he died on June 25, 2025. He was inurned at Chapel of the Chimes on Jan. 7. As they discussed his final resting place, Dorothy tells me that Jim said, "I don't care where I am as long as I'm with you." ●

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The article is typeset in Jim Parkinson's fonts: Richmond (headline) and Benicia (body). Want to see Jim's typefaces used in future issues of Rockridge News as a tribute to the legacy he handcrafted here in Rockridge? Let us know! [editor@rockridge.org](mailto:editor@rockridge.org)



# Solving the Dangerous Intersection of College and Claremont

by Thomas Lollini,  
RCPC Land Use Chair

**N**avigating the complex, six-way intersection of Claremont and College avenues can be a harrowing experience.

Whether you approach it by foot, wheelchair, stroller, bicycle, scooter, motorcycle, car, bus or commercial vehicle—you're ensured chaos.

This is especially true when street traffic is piling up in all directions—double length buses and semi trucks negotiating tight turns while frustrated drivers push through yellow lights and free right turns. Short signal times can leave small children, older adults or people with mobility issues struggling to cross before the signal changes. And everyone feels they could get whacked by a bike or vehicle from any direction.

While the intersection at College and Claremont avenues may seem like an unsolvable tangle of paths, there is a rather simple and elegant solution. Rockridge should insert what is called a pedestrian scramble.

To define it plainly: a pedestrian scramble is a moment when crossing signals are given only to pedestrians, often times with crosswalk markings laid down on the diagonals of the intersection. Giving pedestrians a moment to all cross at once just may be the answer to building a cleaner, safer and more aesthetically pleasing northern gateway to Rockridge.



*Rockridge could imitate Tokyo's famous Shibuya Crossing and insert a 'pedestrian scramble.'*

| Photo by [William Warby](#)

## IT'S COMPLICATED

The intersections of 62nd and Florio streets add complexity, requiring pedestrians to cross two streets just to continue heading down College or Claremont. Not to mention the poorly synchronized signals on top of it all.

From each of the intersection's six approaches, drivers and cyclists have five choices. They can go straight, hard left, soft left, hard right or soft right. This makes for a staggering 30 ways a vehicle can pass through.

Sarah Rich—co-owner of the community hub Local Economy, around the corner from the intersection—said that she wants to give her kids, 9 and 12 years old, the autonomy to walk to their storefront after school.

“They're the ideal age to be allowed an increased independence,” Rich said. “But the intersection is such a barrier to me feeling comfortable with it; it's just so incredibly dangerous.”

The Oakland Department of Transportation (OakDOT)'s Safe Oakland Streets (SOS) program designated Claremont Avenue—the widest and busiest of those streets—as a pedestrian high injury corridor in 2024, and a series of community meetings convened earlier this year has yet to result in traffic calming or diversion strategies in the neighborhood west of this intersection.

Since 2013, when Berkeley identified Claremont Avenue a high-injury street, the road has seen seven severe-injury crashes and a fatality last summer, according to Berkeley's Vision Zero program. Six of the eight incidents involved someone walking or biking. In total, there have been 46 collisions on the avenue over the same period, with failure to yield the primary collision factor in 26% of the incidents, unsafe turns 17% and unsafe speed 15%.

Average daily traffic was recently measured at 9,600 vehicles with more than 500 northbound drivers at peak travel times and 350 going south.

Both Berkeley and Oakland are exploring a range of quick fixes, proposing more prominent markings for crosswalks and bike lanes, lengthening red curbs so that parked cars don't obstruct corners, inserting medians and improving signals and signage all in the coming year.

However, those proposals are somewhat gaudy solutions to functionality, when the pedestrian scramble is an even simpler and perhaps more effective solution.

The mix of shops, services and restaurants between Claremont and Alcatraz are vibrant and thriving—same goes for south on College. At the intersection itself, Sfizio and Oken

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restaurants have become destinations and contribute to the area's vitality.

But the blank walls and empty parking lot of the Bank of America, the dark glass of other financial institutions and the fenced vacant triangle combine with the asphalt expanse in a manner that divides more than unifies the six corners of this important place.

**TOKYO-STYLE AND MORE**

The pedestrian scramble is an idea that some of us in the community have been thinking about for a while now.

The Shibuya Crossing in Tokyo had a similar problem, with multiple conflicting forms of traffic, five corners and over 2,500 people wanting to cross the street in multiple directions at peak times. So, what did they do? They created their own scramble, where all wheel-based traffic halts, and the pedestrians get a fixed period to cross the intersection in any direction they choose.

But adding on to that—to increase overall safety—the pedestrian areas were eventually enlarged and subsequent additional graphics added to the ground plane. The Result? It has become a world famous model for putting people over machines and a tourist attraction that has increased foot traffic to area businesses. In short, it has become a true "place."

For Claremont and College avenues, first imagine increasing the pedestrian space along each approaching sidewalk by the width of a car—if you remove the parking space closest to the corners

and replace them with sidewalk, you have more protected space for people on foot.

This would also shorten crossing distances by about 7 feet on both sides of each street, reducing the crossing distance from 25–40% depending on the width of the street—without impeding traffic, but slowing it to a safer speed. This spatial change works in tandem with the pedestrian scramble, reducing pedestrian crossing times in every direction to shorten the length of the all-ways crossing signal.

It would also add 700–1,000 sq. ft. to the pedestrian space at each corner, accommodating strollers, wheelchairs, conversation groups, space for street furniture, trees, lighting and signage.

In some places this type of area has been used to provide seating integrated into concrete planters, which buffer pedestrians from vehicular and bicycle traffic and encourage hanging out or providing a place to rest while waiting to cross.

While the intersection in Tokyo is relatively functional, asking a traffic engineer to design your city is like asking a plumber to design your

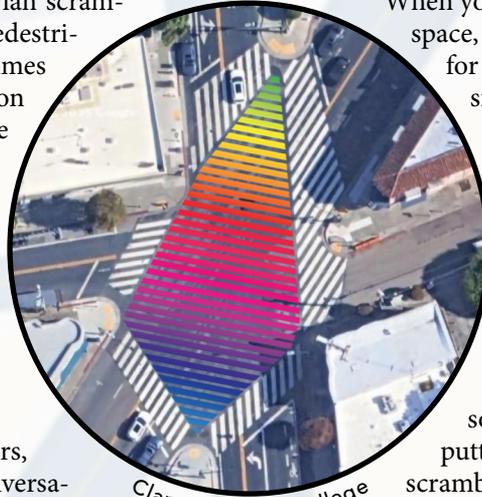
house. Yes, you want the traffic to flow smoothly, but you want to be enjoying the comfort and beauty of the public domain. As Vitruvius once said, "The three essential qualities of building are commodity, firmness and delight!"

So there's no reason we can't have some fun with this idea; let's not miss the opportunity for vibrant street graphics and public art!

When you build on to a public space, you also leave room for community expression and identity. And there are very few limits to what you can do with color on pavement.

Rich doesn't know exactly how the idea came up at one of her recent dinner parties, but someone proposed putting in a pedestrian scramble at the intersection, even mentioning Tokyo's Shibuya Crossing.

"You don't feel a connectedness across the College and Claremont Avenue intersection at all; it feels like different districts," Rich said, noting that the pedestrian scramble might solve that. "It would be very cool if people were freely crossing in all directions through that space; almost like the movement of the pedestrians would knit together the disparate corners of it." ●



Claremont and College

Illustration by Liam Pierce

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# Updating the Timeline for the Former Blood Bank Site

by Mark Aaronson,  
RCPC Board Member

On Dec. 19, the developers of the former American Red Cross Blood Bank at 6230 Claremont Ave. submitted a fully completed land-use application. This application has some design and other changes that differ from the proposal submitted with the preliminary application. The current proposal is for a 7-story building with a total of 203 rental units, which includes 159 independent living units, 20 assisted living units and 24 memory care units.

The proposed project will be subject to Oakland’s standard review process with public hearings.

In 2023, the Red Cross Blood Bank moved to its present Rockridge location

at 5450 College Ave. The former 1.06 acre site is still owned by the Red Cross and is deteriorating. In early 2024, the Rockridge Community Planning Council (RCPC) board learned that the Red Cross was in the process of reviewing bids for the site’s sale and development.

Among bidders were nonprofit affordable housing development organizations. In April 2024, the RCPC board sent a letter to both City officials and private parties, “[RCPC] strongly supports the sale of the 6230 Claremont Avenue property for a 100% affordable housing development project.”

RCPC submitted this letter because we heard from many residents about the desire to have more affordable housing within our transit-oriented and high-resourced neighborhood. RCPC hoped that the Red Cross would align with this vision, but instead it signed an option-to-buy agreement with Ellis Partners and the Spirit Living Group.

In July 2025, the potential buyers as developers filed a preliminary application for the development of a senior residence rental facility with the Oakland Planning Department. The RCPC board met with the developers

in August 2025 and encouraged them to hold a public meeting with neighborhood residents, which took place in September 2025 at the College Avenue Presbyterian Church.

In October 2025, the RCPC board established an RCPC Consultation Committee to meet with the developers throughout the planning process to provide neighborhood input and feedback regarding the project. The members include two RCPC board members (one lives near the site), two residents from the neighborhood generally and three residents whose properties are on Auburn Avenue or Florio Street, narrow streets abutting the project site.

Residents in close proximity to the project site have established their own advocacy group—Rockridge Neighbors for Sensible Housing (RNSH). The three nearby neighbors and an RCPC board member on the RCPC Consultation Committee are also participants in RNSH. While RCPC and RNSH will have their own responses to the proposed project, channels are fully open for continual communication and interaction between them, including regarding any differences that may develop on how to best balance various neighborhood concerns and priorities.

At this stage in the development process, RCPC focuses on gathering information and neighborhood views about the project. Through discussions with the developers, we look to provide a range of concerns and timely feedback. The RCPC Consultation Committee has scheduled a meeting with the developers on Jan. 21. Down the line, the RCPC board will consider taking a position on the project.

In a forthcoming issue of Rockridge News, I will provide a fuller summary of the most recent project specifics. I also will address the extent to which, if at all, State law supersedes Oakland height and bulk zoning requirements and affects the Oakland land use approval process for senior residence rental facilities. Please send questions and comments about the proposed project to [landuse@rockridge.org](mailto:landuse@rockridge.org).



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# Dogs of Rockridge



**GUSTAVO (2)** is a walking morale boost and community resource. A known petting magnet who hits the pup cup hard with his trademark black-marked tongue. You can call him Gus if you know the insider handshake, but he'll know immediately if you're lying. Some day, he's bound to finally tell his therapist that he secretly thinks he's a cat—he was raised by two of them—but for now, he's filing that under 'private thoughts.'

**COOKIE MONSTER (10)** is kind of an uptown girl, who just moved from fancy, metropolitan San Francisco. She eats her caviar out of martini glasses, thank you very much. Prior to that, however, she had some humble beginnings as a rescue from Mexico. This certified snuggle muffin just accepted a new position as Big Sister™ to a human baby. She will protect at all costs and accepting tummy pats as payment. ●



Does your furry friend live in Rockridge? If so, send a photo of your four-legged companion and short commentary to: [editor@rockridge.org](mailto:editor@rockridge.org)

"Dogs of Rockridge" illustration by Laura Serra

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### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

I think that the current proposal for an 8-story building on the site that was Red Cross's Blood Bank is obscene.

Especially since the building appears to be inches from the property lines, rather than being set back.

Yes, we need housing in this neighborhood. And, yes we need more affordable housing in this area. This project as currently designed is way out of scale to the rest of the area. Based on the observations and objections of the immediate neighbors, I feel that this should be scaled back to provide more space between the facility and the immediate neighbors. This current plan has no heart.

Senior housing as described by the developer will necessitate additional kinds of services that would not be required if standard rental housing was being built. This neighborhood's current infrastructure cannot handle these extra services.

I plan on working with the concerned neighbors to fight this current plan and hope that you will do the same.

Susan Shawl  
63rd Street

## Come Write for The Rockridge News! Free Journalism/Storytelling Workshop

Sunday, Feb. 1st: 3-5 p.m. — at Local Economy | 6028 College Ave.

Do you have an interesting bit of news from your block that you'd like to craft into a story? Do you want to share your favorite thing to eat or drink in Rockridge in our section "Best Bites & Beverages on College?"

The Rockridge News has been sharing the stories and news of the neighborhood for nearly 40 years. It is hand delivered by dozens of volunteers to nearly 7,000 doorsteps. It's a powerful vessel to share information, to learn about our community, and to recognize important things happening in the neighborhood.

Learn Journalism 101—even if you think you know it already, there are a ton of hidden structures that help make the news tick—codes of ethics, formulas for reaching an audience, etc.

We'll also be talking about oral storytelling, story structure and building diversity in journalism.

Rockridge News editor Liam Pierce (published: The New York Times, Glamour; former staff writer for: Vice and New Orleans' Times-Picayune) will lead the workshop and participants will come away with:

- A clear understanding of requirements to write for Rockridge News
- Insight from the group on the state of the news
- An understanding of how to tell newsworthy, compelling stories—on the page and in person
- An opportunity to pitch stories
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RSVP by 1/28: [editor@rockridge.org](mailto:editor@rockridge.org)



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## Rockridge Library

### For Children (Red = January-only events)

**Storytime:** Thursdays and Saturdays; 10:30 a.m.

**Chess Club:** Wednesdays; 4 p.m. All ages and skill-levels welcome.

**Read to a Dog:** Thursdays; 4 p.m. Practice reading aloud with Gladys the dog.

#### Craft Programs: MoChA at the Library!

Thursday, Jan. 15, 3:30 p.m. Monthly art workshops for children & families led by teachers from the Museum of Children's Art. For ages 5-15 and caregivers. Build creativity, social-emotional & academic skills through art.

**Making Stories Club:** Thursday, 1/8; 3:30 p.m. Monthly workshop to write, illustrate and tell stories. Make books, zines, stories, comics, kamishibai or plays! Join youth writers and illustrators. For ages 8 to 12.

**Winter BINGO:** Ages 1 to 14, come get a BINGO card. When you do 5 activities in a row, you get to choose your Prize Book. Program ends Jan. 20.

### For Teens ages 12 – 18

**Teen Advisory Board:** Second Wednesdays, Jan. 14; 4-5 p.m. Join the Rockridge Branch Library Teen Advisory Board (TAB) and take an active role in creating, planning and implementing programs and services you want to see at your local library.

**New Year's Party:** Jan. 14, 2-4 p.m. Movie, Popcorn, fortune cookies and sparkling apple juice.

### For Adults

**Jan. 21: Meet the Author:** Coach, facilitator, and movement lawyer, Niloufar Khonsari will discuss her book: *The Future is Collective: Effective Workplace Strategies for Building a Culture of Care*. Copies of the book will be sold on site by A Great Good Place for Books.

**Jan. 27: Hemming & Mending Clothes by Hand.** Local artist will teach us techniques including how to mend holes and shorten pants. Bring clothes that need mending! Registration required. Please call to register.

**Ask Your Area Home Experts:** Every 2nd Friday, 12:00-2:00. Get answers, tips and connections from a Senior Loan Advisor and a Realtor, both Rockridge locals. Have questions answered about home ownership, maintenance, finance, investing, ADUs, downsizing, moving and more.

**Rockridge Book Club:** Every 2nd Saturday, 3:30-4:30 p.m. Please call 510-597-5017 for more info and to get a copy of the book. January's book is "Three Days in June," by Anne Tyler.

**Needlework Circle:** every Thursday, 1-3 p.m. Bring yarn and fiber arts projects to Rockridge Library. Build community, share your passion, learn & have fun!

**1-on-1 Technology Help:** every Saturday, 10 a.m.-12 p.m. and 1-3 p.m., Tuesdays 5:30-7:30 p.m. and Wednesdays 5:30-7:30 p.m. Come with your devices and technology questions and our volunteer tech guru will help you get sorted. Signup recommended.

**Adult Crafting Series:** Tues. Jan. 13, 6-7:30 p.m. Shibori Snowflake Garlands. Back by popular demand! Create a winter wonderland using a simple technique of dying folded & cut snowflakes. Drop ins welcome.

**Chair Yoga:** Monday Jan. 1 and Jan. 26, 10:30-11:30 a.m. Learn from certified instructor Bett Bollhoefer, drop ins welcome. ●

### Rockridge Library Hours:

Mon., Thurs., & Sat.: 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.  
Tues. & Weds.: 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.  
Fri.: 12 noon to 5:30 p.m.

See calendar for events: [oaklandlibrary.org/events](http://oaklandlibrary.org/events)

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